DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 284 185 CS 008 878

AUTHOR Woodley, John W.
TITLE The Reading and Study Skills of College Students: A Descriptive Study.
PUB DATE [86]
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cloze Procedure; College Students; *Content Area Reading; Higher Education; *Learning Strategies; Readability; *Reading Comprehension; Reading Materials; Reading Research; *Reading Strategies; Reading Tests; Secondary Education; Skill Development; *Student Needs; *Study Skills

ABSTRACT

A study investigated the ability of university undergraduates in introductory classes to study effectively. Subjects, 64 students in a western civilization class and 68 students in a sociology class at a moderately sized comprehensive university in a northern plains state, were administered a cloze passage constructed from the textbook being used, as well as a study skills inventory questionnaire relating to reading strategies. Results of the cloze passage procedure clearly indicated that the reading assignments were written at the frustration reading level for students who were expected to read and learn from them, suggesting that the students would need to develop effective study skills--such as practical reading strategies--to deal with the technically difficult material assigned in their classes. Results of the study skills inventory indicated that either the students' strategies for underlining or taking notes during reading were considerably less effective than their strategies for notetaking during lectures, or that they simply had not read the assigned materials. Findings showed that strategies and techniques to help students with content area reading would be most effective if taught at the secondary school level and continued at the university level. (Tables of data are included, and references are appended.) (NKA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED284185

The Reading and Study Skills of College Students: A Descriptive Study

by

John W. Woodley

Pupil Appraisal Center

College of Education

North Texas State University

Denton, TX 76203

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

John W. Woodley

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS008878

As students move from the setting of the high school to that of the college or university, they face changes that are sometimes quite drasitic in the expectations that are made of them in many high schools. Effective teachers in high school typically closely monitor their students' progress, develop a personal relationship with each of the students, provide regular evaluation and adjust teaching strategies according to the progress of their students. Yet when those same students enter college, they encounter a learning situation which is quite different from the high school setting, both in terms of the demands placed upon them and the involvement of the teacher in the learning process.

The traditional and most common instructional approach used at the college level is lecture (Stephens and Weaver, 1985). The teacher comes into class, provides information through an oral presentation and possibly answers questions during the class session. It is the students' responsibility to attend class, take notes, integrate lectures with readings and study the material to prepare for tests. In a real sense, the students and the instructor function quite independently of one another.

Among the changes students encounter is a change in the reading material they are asked to study and use to aid their

learning. It is not uncommon for students in introductory level classes at the university level to be required to read three, four, five or more books for a single class within the span of only one semester. These books often require specialized background and effective reading and study strategies if the students are to adequately comprehend and retain the material presented.

Students are asked to attend classes where each is but one of many nameless individuals in a large group which is taught by a teacher who knows little about any individual within the class. Progress may be checked only once a semester in many classes and it is uncommon for student progress to be checked more than three or four times. The individual attention and concern available in high school is rare, if not totally non-existent, in these classes.

Part of the disparity between the two levels of education lies in the perceived role of the teacher in each setting. The high school teacher is expected to be knowledgeable in the particular content area while also knowing pedagogical strategies and learning theory. The college teacher, however, is seen as an "expert" in the content area of the class. Yet the college teacher is not necessarily knowledgeable of either pedagogical strategies or learning theory.

The study reported in this paper was conducted at a moderately sized comprehenive university on the Northern Plains. At this univeristy, 26% of all entering freshman two years ago

did not return the next year to begin their sophomore year. At the end of the sophomore year, an additional 25% of the original student body did not return to begin their junior year. These figures are consistent with the rate of non-returning students at many state supported universities and colleges throughout the country. Such figures clearly demonstrate the large numbers of students who are not likely to persist with their college careers. Certainly some of those students failed to return because of transfers to other schools, changes in career plans or decisions to temporarily delay their college careers until a later date. Yet a substantial number of those students undoubtedly terminate their college careers because they encounter academic failure in classes which they view as either too difficult or personally meaningless. That is, for many of these students, they find themselves inadequately prepared to meet the demands which are placed on them.

THE STUDY

In order to investigate the ability of undergraduate students in introductory classes at the university level, it was decided to select two sections of students enrolled in introductory courses in sociology and western civilization. These two courses were selected because they represent disciplines where the students would not be likely to encounter highly technical scientific terms. These two courses also represented groups of students large enough to include individuals from all academic majors.

A cloze passage was constructed from the textbooks used in each class. Specifically, one cloze passage was constructed for each class by selecting passages which were assigned on the course syllabus for the week following the administration of the cloze. That is, the students were considered by the instructor in each class to be ready for the material which had been assigned. The cloze passages were administered during the eighth and ninth week of the semester in order to allow the students the opportunity develop adequate background knowledge of the academic discipline before completing this task.

In addition to the cloze passage, each student was also administered a study skills inventory (see Estes and Vaughan, 1978, p. 112-113). The inventory used was selected because the questions were consistent with recommendations made to the students in study skills classes conducted at the university. Also, the professors of the classes used in this study examined four study skills questionnaires available and found this questionnaire to be most consistent with the needs their students would be likely to have during the semester. The inventory asked students to rate themselves in each of the following areas:

Use of time

Using a textbook

Underlining while reading

Notetaking from reading

Notetaking from lectures

Outlining

Using maps

Taking essay tests

Taking objective tests

The self-ratings were along a four point scale, with choices of "1 = usually," "2 = sometimes," "3 = seldom" or "4 = never." The ideas presented were in the form of statements (e.g., I underline all important ideas as I read).

Both instruments (the cloze passage and the study skills inventory) were administered at the beginning of the same class session to each of the two groups. Each group was able to complete both instruments in twenty-five to thirty minutes. Sixty-four students in the western civilization class and sixty-eight students in the sociology class were sampled for a total sample size of one-hundred-thirty-two.

RESULTS

Standards presented by Estes and Vaughan (1978) which had been modified from Bormuth (1968) to score and evaluate the results of cloze passages were utilized. Individual scores were tallied but the mean score for each group was utilized to determine findings. According to these standards, a mean score of 60% or higher would indicate that the reading material is at the readers' independent reading level; a mean score of 40% to 60% would indicate that the reading material is at the readers' instructional reading level; a mean score of below 40% would indicate that the material is at the readers' frustration

reading level. The mean scores for both groups of students fell below 20% accuracy. The mean score for Introduction to Sociology was 19.72 with a range of 14% to 64% accuracy and a standard deviation of 6.57. The mean score for Western Civilization was 18.06 with a range of 4% to 58% accuracy with a standard deviation of 6.61. That is, both texts could be considered to be at the frustration reading level for these readers. The material would be extremely difficult for the students to read in an effective manner. For these students to effectively deal with the content of those reading assignments, it is asserted that effective strategies for studying and reading the textual material could be utilized to increase their comprehension of the text. Without such strategies, students performing at this level when reading textual materials would be likely to fail to adequately comprehend the text. It was to examine these strategies that a study skills inventory was administered.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY SKILLS INVENTORY

A study skills inventory was administered following the cloze passage. The inventory was given to determine the study skills these students reported as those they employed in studying for their college classes.

Study skills can be considered as encompassing two areas concern: study habits, which includes matters relating to the circumstances of studying (e.g., time, place, lighting, etc.) and study strategies, which relate to the specific approaches to

studying (e.g., underlining, notetaking, previewing, questioning, reciting, etc.). Each of these areas contributes to the ultimate success of studying.

Only two statements which specifically addressed study habits were included in this inventory. One statement concerned the ability of the student to follow through with intentions to study (When I study, I can stick with it until I am finished). The other statement related to the conditions the student creates for studying (I study where I will not be interrupted.) The results for both statements were positively skewed (i.e., between the responses "usually" and "sometimes"). For the first statement, the mean score was 1.77 with a standard deviation of .74; for the second statement, the mean score was 1.65 with a standard deviation of .82. For both statements the range of answers was from 1 to 4, from "usually" to "never".

The study skills inventory used contained sections which related to reader strategies in the following areas: using a textbook, underlining while reading, notetaking while reading, notetaking in a lecture, outlining, using maps, taking essay tests and taking objective tests. (NOTE: The subjects in this instructed to consider highlighting as being the same as underlining.) The purpose of this study was to relate reader strategies for learning in college classes. For the sake of emphasizing differences between the students' strategies for learning from reading material and strategies for learning from a lecture, three groups of statements (i.e., those statements

that related notetaking while reading, notetaking during a lecture and underlining while reading) were analyzed for the purpose of determining differences in approaches to learning according to how the information is presented.*

The group scores for these three areas are presented in

* The specific statements considered in each category are as follows:

UNDERLINING: I underline all important ideas as I read.
(UL) I underline only key words and phrases, not whole sentences.
I underline important details and examples.

NOTETAKING-READING:
(NOTES-R) When I study, I take notes from my reading.
When I take notes from my reading, they are clear enough to make sense several weeks later.
When I take notes from my reading, I put down the page numbers where I got the information.

NOTETAKING-LECTURES:
(NOTES-L) When a teacher is lecturing in class, I take notes of what is said.
In my lecture notes, I make sure to write down the main ideas.
In my lecture notes, I include details and examples that help me clarify ideas.

Table 1. The range of scores for any one set of three statements was from three as a minimum to twelve as a maximum. The lower the mean score, the more closely the subjects approximated responding "always" to that group of items.*

TABLE 1

Mean Scores and Standard Deviation for Three Sets of Study Strategies

	MEAN	S.D.
Notes-L	4.13	1.37
UL	6.02	2.14
Notes-R	7.28	2.40

Analysis of variance conducted with these results revealed no statistically significant differences between subjects. Yet the statistical difference was significant between treatments (the three sets of statements asked) at the .001 level. The summary of the ANOVA is presented in Table 2.

* NOTE: Subjects who failed to respond to all nine questions used for this analysis were not included in the analysis of the data for these scores.

TABLE 2

ANOVA for Notetaking during a Lecture, Underlining when Reading and Notetaking while Reading

Source: Between Subjects

Sum of Squares: 621.49

DF: 121

Var. Est.: 5.14

F-Ration: 0.83

Probability: 0.8702

Source: Treatments

Sum of Squares: 654

DF: 2

Var. Est.: 327.02

F-Ratio: 93.11

Probability: 0.0001

These findings clearly indicate that one of two things may be happening: either the students' strategies for underlining or taking notes during reading are considerably less effective than their strategies for taking notes from a lecture or they simply cannot indicate effective strategies during reading because they simply do not read the assigned materials. Either conclusion leads to a fairly dismal prediction for the performance for students who find it necessary to read effectively to learn what is required of them in college

classes.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The cloze passage clearly indicated that the reading assignments in both classes were written at the frustration reading level for the students who were expected to read and learn from them. Courses which require reading technical or scientific material would represent an even greater level of difficulty for the vast majority of students. This difficulty is a factor that the students with which they must be able to effectively deal if they are to succeed in university classes. Probably the most practical way for students to read and learn from the material assigned in their classes would be through effective study skills.

The limited data gathered on study habits indicate that most of the students appropriately approach studying in the area of study habits. Yet they report using strategies that are likely to be more effective when taking notes during a lecture than when either taking notes or underlining when they are reading. The fact that taking notes during a lecture was approached more effectively than either of the reading strategies suggests that the reading difficulty disclosed through the cloze passage is unlikely to be overcome through study strategies. The high rate of students failing to return to the university cited earlier must be due, at least in part, to this lack of facility in approaching college level reading and studying.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The implications of such a finding are at least three-fold. First, it is incumbent on instructors in college-level introductory courses to provide background, assistance and support for the reading their students are expected to complete in their classes. Teaching techniques and strategies, such as structured overviews, reading guides, small group discussion, Guided Reading Procedure and ReQuest, are available and have been found to be quite effective in helping students in content area reading (for useful guides to such techniques, consult Vacca,1981; Estes and Vaughan, 1978). Such strategies are commonly pesented to prospective teachers at the secondary school level in courses on reading instruction in the content areas required for certification in many states.

Second, it is the role of the high school teacher to help students develop strategies for effectively approaching reading material. These strategies should be strategies which they can use when studying on their own, even when no teacher is avaiable for support or assistance. Strategies should include such approaches as setting a purpose for reading, knowing how and why to take notes and underline during reading, monitoring comprehension while reading to determine the effectiveness of the reading, summarizing and paraphrasing important points and integrating reading materials with lecture or discussion notes. Self-questioning strategies such a those suggested by King, Biggs and Lipsky (1984) or Tei and Stewart (1985) would enable

students to become better able to read and monitor their reading independently of the teacher. For students to effectively develop such strategies during their high school years, instruction and modeling in the use of such strategies must be a deliberate and conscious part of the instructional program during that time.

Third, the ultimate responsibility for insuring success in college or any endeavor rests not with teachers or instructors at either the high school or college level, but with the individual seeking that success - the student. Students must accept responsibility for meeting the requirements presented to them by their instructors. It is their responsibility to establish and maintain an effective study schedule and an equally effective set of study habits. Additionally, they must adopt study strategies which they find effective and adapt them to meet their personal needs and the needs of the learning situation. It is their responsibility to build up their personal background to meet the requirements of the materials they are to read. Students must be willing to ask questions when they are confused, to seek help and assistance from their instructors, the library or other students when they need it. Additionally, students should seek out and take full advantage of services available to them on campus to help them meet the demands of college life. Special study skills courses, reading courses or tutorial programs are available on many college campuses. Those resources only help those willing to seek them

out and use them.

The suggestions made in this section are far reaching. They carry implications for the college instructor, the high school teacher and, most importantly, the student. Yet as colleges have shifted from being available only to the intellectually elite to the general enrollment programs of today, so has the roles of those involved shifted. We must find ways of meeting the educational needs of college students, even if they are not among the elite. That is our responsibility as teachers at the college level.

References

Bormuth, J. (1968). Readability in 1968 New York: National Conference on Reasearch in English.

Estes, T. & Vaughan, J. (1978). Reading and learning in the concent classroom: Diagnostic and instructional strategies, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc.

King, R.K., Biggs, S. & Lipsky, S. (1985). Students' self-questioning and summarizing as reading study strategies. Journal of Reading Behavior, 16(3).

Stephens, E.C. & Weaver, D.R. (1985). Improving student achievement and instructional effectiveness in higher education. Forum for Reading, 16(2).

Tei, E. & Stewart, O. (1985). Effective studying from text: Applying metacognitive strategies. Forum for Reading, 16(2).

Vacca, R.T. & Vacca, J. (1986). Content Area Reading, Boston: Little, Brown and Company.